

Madam Chair, I rise in strong opposition to H.R. 2112, the Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act for Fiscal Year 2012. This bill ignores the plight of hundreds of thousands of women and children who struggle to obtain nutritious food in neighborhoods across America. The measure originally put forward by the Republican majority proposed \$833 million in cuts to the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children, commonly known as WIC. This program provides assistance to new mothers, babies, and children under five who have been identified as nutritionally at risk. In any decent society, this is the most basic obligation we have to our fellow citizens. Yet the funding level proposed by the majority would have left 400,000 to 550,000 women and children without this aid.

I am pleased that the Appropriations Committee adopted an amendment by my colleague, Representative *DeLauro*, to reinstate \$147 million in WIC funding. Even with this restoration, however, between 200,000 and 350,000 low-income women and children around the country would be dropped from the program next year. In New Jersey, as many as 6,500 citizens could lose this assistance.

I would remind those who claim that we cannot afford the cost of this program that just one week of lost revenue from the Bush tax breaks for millionaires, which were extended over my objection, would more than fill the gap in funding for this program to ensure that every mother and child has access to healthy meals. On average, nationwide, we are talking about just 57 dollars per month for nearly 10 million mothers and infants who cannot afford nutritious foods. Almost one-half of the children born in our country rely on WIC. Many of these enter the Medicaid program, and experience has shown that the nutritional benefit to pregnant women results in up to \$4.20 in Medicaid savings for each dollar spent through WIC. Restoring full funding for this program is the smart thing to do for our budget, just as it is the right thing to do for our citizens.

Women and infants are not the only vulnerable population put at greater risk of food insecurity by this bill. The 22 percent cut to the Commodity Supplemental Food Program will prevent at least 130,000 low-income seniors from receiving desperately needed food packages. The 23 percent reduction to the Emergency Food Assistance Program will leave empty shelves at our local food banks, pantries, faith-based organizations, soup kitchens, and shelters. With food prices continuing to rise sharply and Americans continuing to struggle to get ahead in a tough economy, now is not the time to remove the critical safety net provided by these food assistance programs. In addition, food aid for 1.1 million people around the world will be unavailable as a result of the \$476 million cut to the Food for Peace international humanitarian program and the McGovern-Dole program, which provides for the donation of U.S. agriculture goods to school

feeding initiatives around the world.

Furthermore, the drastic reduction to the Commodity Futures Trading Commission budget will leave the U.S. economy and consumers in peril. The Commission will not have the resources necessary to prevent the big banks from making the kinds of speculative bets that led to the recent financial crisis. And as gas prices continue to strain household and small business budgets, this bill will do nothing to help the Commission go after excessive speculation in oil markets--even though recent data suggest that nearly 90 percent of those trading in the oil markets are speculators, not legitimate users of oil. These speculators are driving up the price of petroleum and gasoline, and without an effective CFTC with adequate funding, consumers and taxpayers are the losers.

This bill also includes severe funding cuts for the USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service and the Food and Drug Administration, FDA, which will undermine food safety in America and weaken efforts to ensure that medical products and new drugs are safe and accessible. It underfunds research programs to improve food production, safety, and quality as well as initiatives designed to advance organic farming and related markets. And it eliminates almost one billion dollars in conservation programs to protect soil and farmland, maintain healthy agriculture in rural America, preserve key resources, and restore wildlife habitat that supports associated recreational and economic opportunities.

Mr. Speaker, the Agriculture Appropriations bill before us today is one more step in the wrong direction for the Nation's budget, our economy, and our people. It leaves vulnerable low-income women, infants, children, and seniors to fend for themselves even though we know that good nutrition improves health and saves money in the long run. It allows Wall Street speculation to continue unchecked, threatening our economy and driving up gas prices. It says that we should ignore the needs of our faith- and community-based food service organizations as well as those of hungry children and impoverished people around the world. And it leaves us all at greater risk of encountering food-borne illnesses, sets back research programs, and ignores our conservation needs. The American people expect more of their government, and I urge my colleagues to oppose this deeply flawed bill.